

Archaeological watching brief at Dodford Priory, Priory Road, Dodford, Worcestershire



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Peter Lovett and Tom Vaughan

Background information

<i>Client</i>	Ian Barnes
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 93255 72834
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	WSM 66637
<i>Planning authority</i>	Historic England
<i>Reference</i>	SAM ref. SM30022, HA 1018278, S00106537
<i>Project design</i>	WA 2015
<i>Project parameters</i>	ClfA 2014

Previous archaeological work on the site

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

The scheduling recording undertaken by English Heritage prior to the listing of the site as a scheduled ancient monument occurred in 1998.

The background to the priory provided by the Historic Environment Record (HER) is as follows (WCC 2015):

"Dodford Priory was at the core of the medieval landscape in this area. In the 19th century, planned development of the landscape took place when a settlement was established by the Chartist Land Company. Industrial workers and their families were provided with cottages, on plots of two to four acres, enabling them to live self-sufficiently, and to qualify for the right to vote. The Historic Farmsteads Project has identified two historic farmsteads in the search area. There are 35 historic buildings, of which nine are listed (two Grade II* and seven Grade II).

There is no recorded evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity in the search area. The most significant archaeological features in this area are the surviving medieval building structures from Dodford Priory, and its associated ponds and earthworks. The priory had its origins as an Augustinian cell, founded in the late 12th century, and was later incorporated into Halesowen Abbey. By the early 16th century, Dodford Priory's lands were leased out, and it was dissolved in 1536.

Dodford Priory (WSM00498) occupied a large triangular moated site, which was scheduled in 1998. The main buildings of the priory were sited in the vicinity of the present house (WSM03396). This is excluded from the scheduling but Grade II* Listed, and is believed to contain the remains of the refectory. Following the Dissolution the priory was rebuilt as a farmhouse in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Further alterations were carried out in the mid 19th century and again in the late 20th century when the building was converted to a private house. Alton House (now Priory Cottage) (WSM12324) has substantial cellars that may relate to the priory. The Grade II* Listed parish church is south of Dodford Priory and was built in 1908 in the Arts and Crafts style.

Some traces of earlier structures can be seen in the gardens around the existing house at Dodford Priory. The chapel is thought to have been on the south side of the court. The circuit of the moat is complete except along the northern angle, towards the road, where it has been partly infilled and built over. To the east of Dodford Priory are the remains of two substantial

fishponds (WSM01426), while an L-shaped feature (WSM37404) north-east of the house, and marked as 'Moat' on the 1st edition and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps, may have actually comprised stew ponds for fish. In a field to the west of Dodford Priory, aerial photography has revealed earthworks, possibly including fishponds, building platforms and a rabbit warren (WSM09879). To the south of these features, holloways and an area of ridge and furrow (WSM10023) have been reported.

North of Dodford Priory, the landscape is characterised by the 19th century, planned layout of the roads and smallholdings of the Chartist settlement. Five of the Chartist cottages within the search area are Grade II Listed, including Rosedene, which is now preserved by the National Trust."

Aims

The aims and scope of the watching brief were to observe and record any archaeological deposits encountered during ground reduction works for the swimming pool cover and pipes associated with the heating supply.

Methods

General specification for fieldwork

WA 2012

Sources consulted

HER

Sources cited by the HER

1st edition OS map

Date(s) of fieldwork

13 May 2015

Area of site

c 120m²

Sampling	area sampled	c 6.79m ² ; indicated on Fig 2
	sample size	c 0.05%

Dimensions of excavated areas observed –

Trench 1 (foundations)	length	5.2m
	width	0.7m
	depth	0.5m
Trench 2 (services)	length	7m
	width	0.45m
	depth	0.22m

Access to or visibility of deposits

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during hand excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified. Selected areas totalling 2m² were cleaned by hand.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Deposit description

The natural geology consisted of a firm mid brownish red clay marl (101). This was observed at 0.3m below existing ground level within the pool house (Plates 1 and 4).

Cutting through the natural marl was an oval pit (104) measuring 1.05m long, at least 0.44m wide and 0.26m deep (excavated depth), which extended into the east trench baulk. It contained a complete and articulated juvenile cattle skeleton (103), below backfill (102) (Plates 3-5; pers comm Elizabeth Pearson, WA Senior Environmental Officer). The condition of the bones was good. It was recorded photographically (Plate 3).

A mixed reddish grey layer of modern made ground (100), generally 0.30m deep, overlay pit (104). This was deposited in association with the construction of the swimming pool. The construction cut for the swimming pool truncated both the modern made ground (100) and the natural (101), and was backfilled with gravel (105). It missed cutting the burial pit by c 0.05m.

In Trench 2 a red sand (202) sealed modern pipework leading to the pool, which in turn was sealed by gravel backfill (201) before being overlain with turf (200) (Plate 2).

A full description of the deposits is given in Appendix 1.

Discussion

In the two trenches that were observed, only Trench 1 yielded archaeological remains (Plate 1). This was a small pit containing an articulated juvenile cattle skeleton, cutting into the natural red marl (Plates 3-5). No dating evidence was recovered from this feature. Some of the bone was removed for species identification by WA Senior Environmental Officer. The forelegs and lower back legs extended within the eastern baulk of the trench and were not disturbed. Within the trench the bones that lay above the impact level of the construction works were placed with the remaining assemblage below that depth and covered in soil. The rest of the Trench 1 truncated only the natural clay.

Whilst no dating was recovered that could be associated with the cattle pit, given the importance of the priory as a religious site through the medieval period, it is unlikely that an animal carcass would have been interred so close to the building until after the Reformation. It is therefore considered to be a post-medieval or modern date.

Trench 2 was excavated to a shallow depth, directly over a known modern service pipe (Plate 2). Therefore the only deposits observed were the turf and modern gravel and sand.

No archaeological artefacts were recovered, nor significant deposits, layers, structures or horizons identified.

Conclusions

Whilst the wider site of Dodford Priory is of great importance and potentially contains significant archaeological deposits, the present investigation has demonstrated that the area beneath the modern swimming pool house has been heavily truncated, probably during its original construction. The top and subsoils had been stripped away down into the natural clay, and the pool base itself set within the ground, taking up much of the footprint of the overall structure. The potential remains, however, for the survival of deeper negative archaeological features cut into the natural within the footprint of the building, and at shallower depth across the rest of the site

Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Ian Barnes at Dodford Priory, Priory Road, Dodford, Worcestershire (NGR SO 93255 72834; HER ref WSM 66637). Excavations within the existing swimming pool house revealed a pit containing an articulated juvenile cattle skeleton, considered to be of post-medieval or modern date. The top and subsoils were found to have been largely removed previously, for the swimming pool which lay directly over the natural undisturbed geology. No archaeological artefacts were recovered, nor significant deposits, layers, structures or horizons identified, although it is considered that the potential remains for the survival of deeper negative archaeological features within the footprint of the building, and at shallower depth across the rest of the site.

Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Ian Barnes (Dodford Priory), and Aisling Nash (Historic Environmental Record Officer, Worcestershire County Council).

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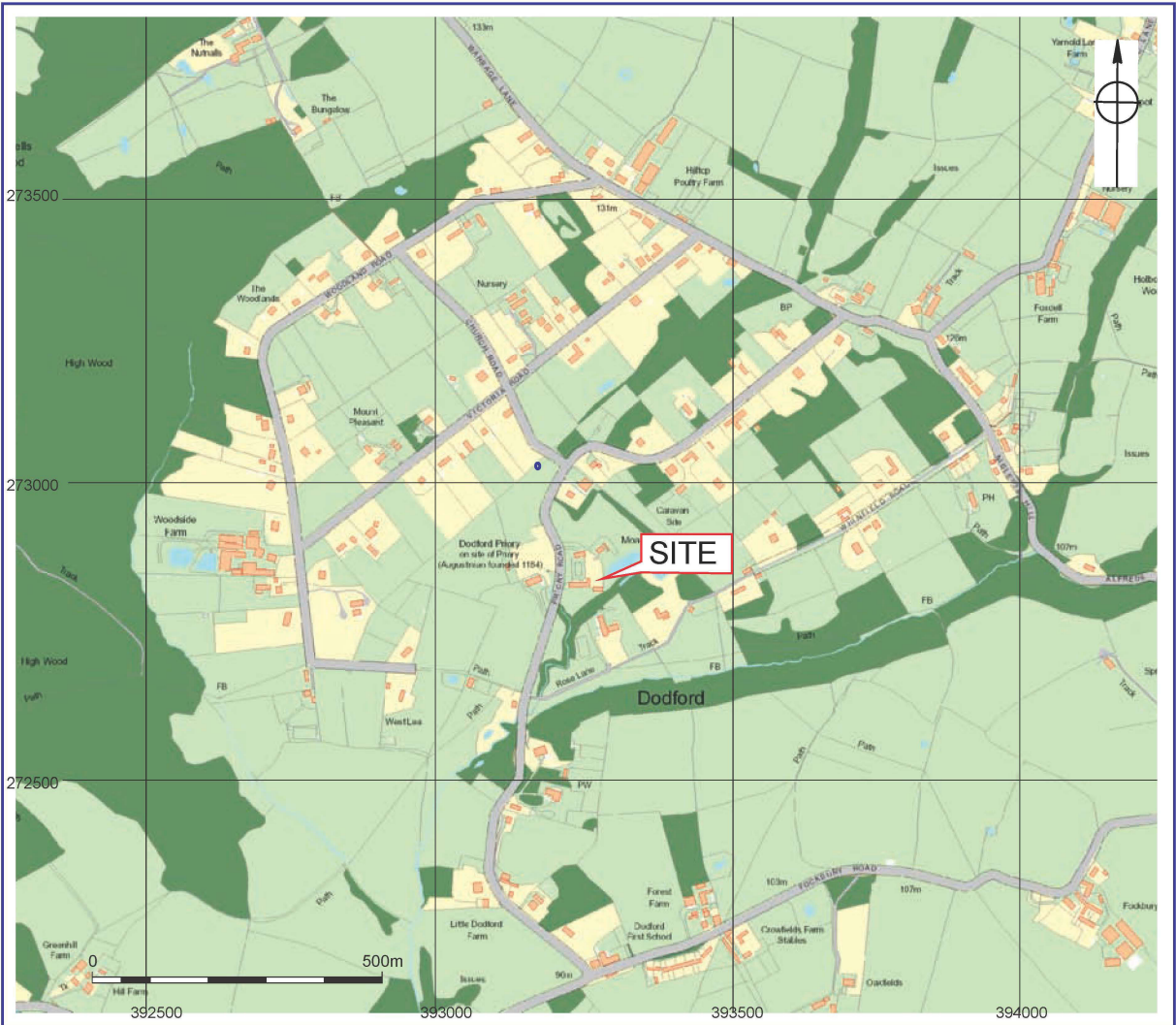
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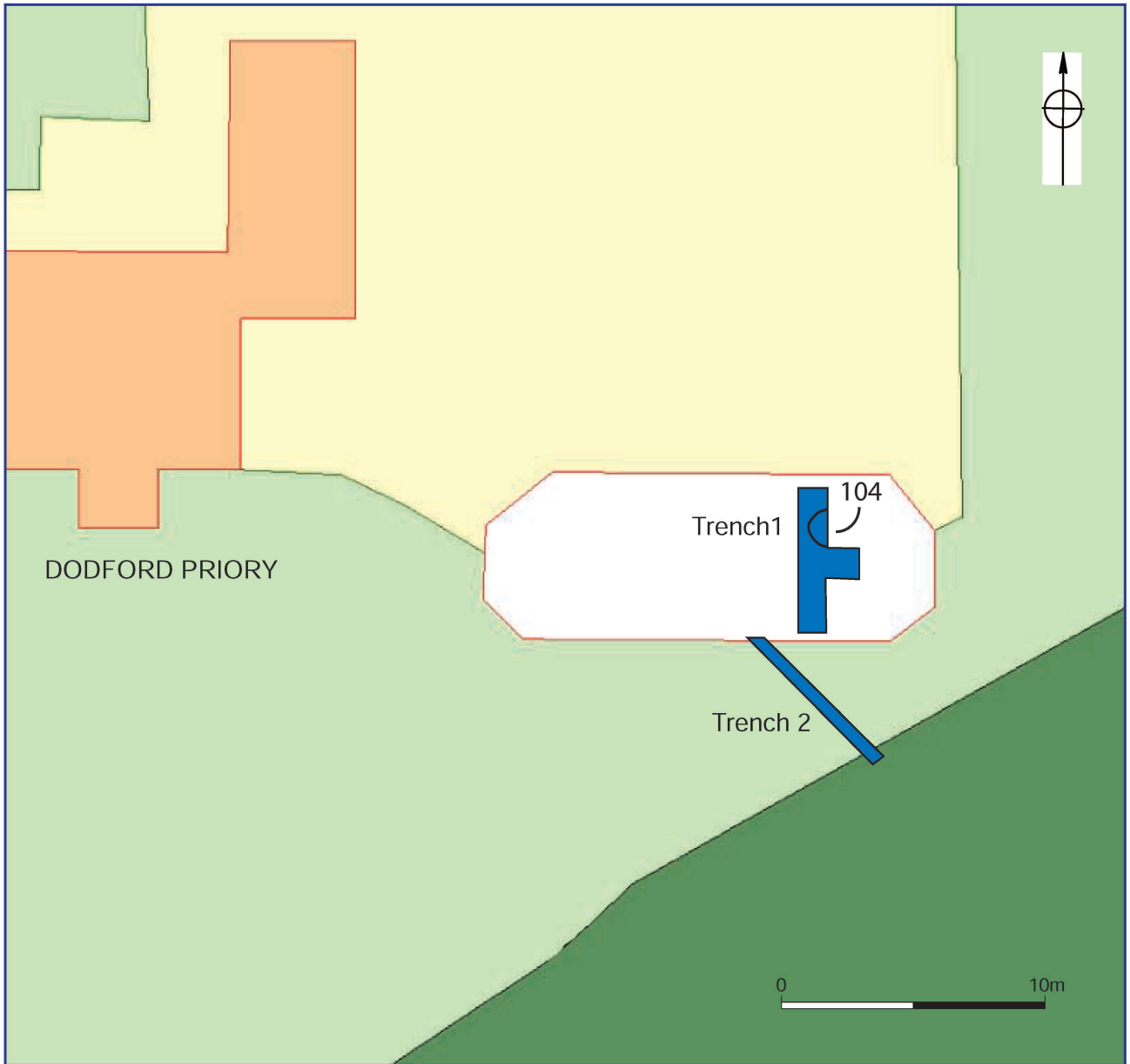
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench locations

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1 Trench 1 excavated, view south, 1m scale



Plate 2 Trench 2 excavated, view north-west, 1m scale



Plate 3 Articulated cattle skeleton 103 in Trench 1, view west, 1m scale (NB north arrow is slightly off)



Plate 4 Cut of pit for cattle skeleton 103, in section of Trench 1, view east, 1m scale



Plate 5 Trench 1 showing location of the burial pit in relation to the swimming pool, view north-west

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 5.2m Width: 0.7m Orientation: north to south

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
100	Modern Layer	Layer	Firm mid reddish grey silty clay	0.3m	Modern made ground associated with construction of Swimming Pool
101	Natural	Layer	Firm mid brownish red clay	0.2m +	Natural red marl
102	Backfill	Fill	Soft mid greyish red silty clay	0.26m	Pit backfill
103	skeleton	Fill			animal skeleton
104	Pit	Cut		0.26m	Pit for animal skeleton
105	Construction Cut	Fill	Loose light whitish grey Hardcore	0.5m +	Gravel fill of swimming pool construction cut
106	Construction Cut	Cut		0.5m +	Cut for swimming pool

Trench 2

Length: 7m Width: 0.45m Orientation: north-west to south-east

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
200	Topsoil	Layer	Firm dark greyish brown	0.08m	Turf line
201	Linear	Fill	Loose light whitish grey Hardcore	0.07m	Gravel backfill of pipe
202	Linear	Fill	Soft mid orangey red sand	0.09m +	Red sand backfill around pipes

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 66637)

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 24 Digital photographs
- 2 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Computer disk
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Museums Worcestershire
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

Summary of data for Worcestershire HER
